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## HUMAN HAIR—REAL AND FALSE.

THE dark-haired races of mankind, according to Dr Prichard, inhabit the greater portion of the habitable globe. The black-haired Celts and Cymri were driven out by the fair-haired followers of the Norwegian sea-kings, and later by the Danes of the same type. Dr Wynter points out, that, at the present moment, the fairest-haired inhabitants of the earth are to be found north of the parallel 48 degrees. This line cuts off England, Belgium, the whole of Northern Germany, and the greater portion of Russia. Race determines the colour of the hair more than latitude or temperature; hence, brown hair has of course resulted from the admixture of the dark and light haired races. This colour is very predominant in England. Dr Beddoes examined the hair of 726 women, and of those he found that 22 had red hair; 95, fair hair; 240, brown; 336, dark brown; and only 33 had black hair. In one case, a weight of 22,000 grains has been supported by a single hair.

We have heard of a scientific barber who always enlightened his customers by informing them that 'the human hair is an hollow tube.' He was right. Each hair is a cylindrical tube  $\frac{1}{15}$ th part of an inch in diameter; and colour depends upon the fluid which fills it. The colouring matter is drawn directly from the blood. Golden hair owes its brightness to an excess of sulphur and oxygen; and black, to a great deal of carbon, and little sulphur and oxygen. Gray hair is, of course, owing to an absence of the colouring matter. In albinos, the hair is perfectly white. Marie Antoinette's hair turned gray in the night preceding her execution. Dr Wynter supposes that the blood sends some fluid among the pigment of the hair which at once changes its colour. The same author remarks, that in some, though very rare instances, persons have been born with patches of white hair; and there is at present in the Museum of Natural History at Paris a portrait of a piebald negro, in which the hair of the head presents very much the party-coloured appearance of the wigs exposed in the shop-windows, half-black and

half-white, as specimens of the power of the various hair-dyes.

Respecting the hair standing on end from fright or other causes, the earliest instance is that mentioned by Job (iv. 15): 'Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up,' &c. Virgil, Seneca, and Shakspeare all allude to this. Dr Washbourne says this is owing to the outer layers of the hair-follicle being derived from the corium or 'true' skin containing muscular fibres; these fibres, by the stimulus of mental emotion, contract, thereby causing the protrusion of the follicle, and consequent erection of the hair. The so-called 'goose-skin' is caused by similar contractility. Some physiologists think that curly hair is produced from a flattening of one side of the hair more than the other.

The apertures of the skin in which the hair grows are so constructed that, after a head has become bald, all the oils and pomades that have ever been advertised are powerless to revive the growth of the hair. An eminent German counted the number of hairs in heads of four different colours: in a blonde one, he found 140,400 hairs; in a brown, 109,440; in a black, 102,962; and in a red one, 88,740.

The Assyrians were very particular about their hair; and the beard was curled and plaited, as any one may observe in the Nineveh marbles in the British Museum. In that collection, an auburn wig, found in the Temple of Isis, at Thebes, is preserved: it must have been in the tomb upwards of two thousand years. The Egyptian kings had gold thread interwoven with their beards. This nation shaved their heads and chins, and wore wigs and artificial beards. The beard of a god is represented in their sculptures as being turned up at the end. The Egyptian women, as appears by figures of Isis, cut it square round the neck; but that strange *coiffure* which is seen upon Egyptian figures, on coins of Juba and the Parthian kings, Count Caylus thinks to be a peruke of wool. Curling hair was used by both sexes among the Phrygians and Sybarites; the Armenians wore their hair twisted in the form of a mitre; the

Persians, long, flowing, and curled; and the Arabians, cut upon the crown of the head.

The Jewish women kept their hair long, and also the men. Absalom's hair is said to have weighed two hundred shekels. Josephus tells us that Solomon, on grand occasions, was preceded by forty pages with their hair powdered with gold-dust. It is on record that Mausolus, king of Caria, to whose manes Artemisia erected the celebrated tomb, had a number of wigs manufactured, and then ordered all his subjects to be shaved, in order to compel them to buy his perukes at any price, to recruit his exhausted treasury.

The Greeks were very chaste in the arrangement of their hair; both sexes gathered it up into a kind of knot on the crown of the head, which was often ornamented with a grasshopper. They used hair-dye, for we read that the sculptor Miron, aged seventy, fell in love with Lais; and, after he had been repulsed, had his white locks dyed black, and asked again; but she replied: 'How can I grant thee to-day what I refused to thy father yesterday?' Ælian describes the tresses of Atalanta as being golden or tawny (*castellus*). Evelyn says the Greeks shaved the heads of their children, leaving locks on each side, which they afterwards consecrated to their divinities.

The Romans were more elaborate than the Greeks about their hair. As the slaves were invariably cropped, the Roman gentlemen cultivated long hair. The Emperor Commodus powdered his with gold-dust. Martial says:

A beau is one who, with the nicest care,  
In parted locks divides his curling hair;  
One who with balm and cinnamon smells sweet,  
Whose humming lips some Spanish air repeat.

They used a liquid for turning the hair black, prepared from leeches which had been left to putrefy for sixty days. But a dye that changed dark hair to fair was the most fashionable; it was made of a soap composed of goats' fat and ashes. Martial calls it Malliac balls, from Mallium in Germany. Ovid reproaches his mistress for having destroyed her hair by the use of injurious dyes. Ladies even cut off their hair, if dark, to replace it with a flaxen wig. When a man attained his majority, he shaved off his beard, and presented it at the temple of one of the gods. Nero presented his to Jupiter Capitolinus. Shaving continued in fashion until the time of Hadrian, who let his beard grow, to cover imperfections in his chin. Galen tells us that, in his time, women suffered much from headaches, contracted by standing bareheaded in the sun, to obtain this golden tint, which others attempted by the use of saffron. St Gregory Nazianzen, extolling his sister, says: 'She has no yellow hair tied in knots and arranged in curls.' The Romans began to cut the hair about 454 A.D., when Titinus Mœnas introduced barbers from Sicily. Many busts and statues in the Vatican and elsewhere have actually marble wigs upon them.

Diodorus Siculus says that the Britons, who had red hair, washed it in water boiled with lime to make it redder. The ancient Gauls had a like custom of washing the hair with a lixivium made of chalk, in order to make it redder. At the beginning of the French monarchy, the people chose their kings by the length of their hair. The Venetian ladies dyed their hair a gold colour by a

preparation consisting of two pounds of alum, six ounces of black sulphur, and four ounces of honey distilled in water.

Long hair was a distinguishing feature with the Danes. In an ancient Danish poem, *The Death-song of Lodbroc*, we have mention made of 'the lover of the lady *beauteous in his locks*.' The hair of King Canute hung in rich profusion over his shoulders.

In the Anglo-Saxon illuminations of Prudentius, the hair appears to be cut short; but long hair was fashionable in the time of Edward the Confessor—persons not noble being obliged, as in France, to cut it round upon the middle of the forehead. In Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, the beard and hair are frequently painted *blue*. Strutt, remarking upon this, says: 'In some instances, which are not so common, the hair is represented of a bright red colour, and in others it is of a green and orange hue. I have no doubt existing in my own mind that arts of some kind were practised at this period to colour the hair; but whether it was done by tinging or dyeing it with liquids prepared for that purpose, according to the ancient eastern custom, or by powder of different hues cast into it, agreeably to the modern practice, I shall not presume to determine.' When monks were shorn, the first lock was cut off by the king or some great person. Gifts to the church were often confirmed by laying hairs of the head upon the altar.

Time has very little effect upon hair. The auburn locks of the Countess D'Albini, wife of the founder of Wymondham Abbey, were found to be as fine and glossy as if just taken from the head of a living person, when her tomb was opened seven hundred years after her burial. Fabyan, in his *Cronicle*, says: 'At this time [William I.] priests used bushed and braided heads, long-tailed gounes, and blasyn clothes, shynying and golden girdles, and rode with gilt spurs, using of divers other enormities.' The Norman ladies coloured their hair to give it a yellow tint. In the twelfth century, the hair was parted from the front of the forehead to the crown. Astrologers speak of fit days for combing the hair, so that it is probable our ancestors did not perform that operation daily. In the reigns of Henry III. (1216) and Edward I. (1272), the hair was worn very bushy at the sides, and arrayed in large curls. Chaucer says the locks of the young squire were curled as if laid in a press. The same author thus describes Emelie in the *Knights Tale*:

Hire yelwe heer was browid in a tresse  
Behynde hire back, a yerde long, I gesse.

The ladies in the thirteenth century gathered up the hair into a net or caul of gold thread, replacing the gracefully arranged *couvre-chef* of the previous century. 'Alexis of Piemount' has the following receipt 'to make heare as yelow as golde': 'Take the ryne or the scrappynge of rubarbe, and stiepe it in white wyne or in clear lye; and after you have washed your head with it, you shall weate your heares with a sponge or some other cloth, and lette them drye by the fyre, or in the sunne. After this, weate them and drye them agayne; for the oftener you dooe it, the fairer they will be, without hurting your head anyethyng at all.'

In the fourteenth century, the hair was parted

on the forehead, and confined at each side of the face, usually in plaits; a gorget or wimple covered the neck, and was drawn up over the chin, strained up each side of the face, and generally fastened across the forehead, which was encircled with a fillet, ornamented with jewels. Over the head a veil was drawn, which fell down upon the shoulders. In the latter part of the century, cauls or close caps were worn, made of network, in which the hair was confined round the face. The fronts were frilled in various patterns. Some of the cauls were of gold and silver network ornamented with jewels at the intersection.

Soon after the commencement of the fifteenth century, the side cauls of the crespine head-dress were always of large size; frequently the outer edges were elevated above the forehead, so as to form horns; hence these head-dresses were called *horned*. About 1470, the wired or butterfly head-dress began to be much in fashion, especially among ladies of rank. The hair was strained into a richly ornamented cap, over which a veil of fine materials was extended, making altogether a very preposterous affair. At the end of the century, a kind of bonnet was used. Its leading characteristics were long frontlets or lappets, which formed an angle over the forehead, and hung down at each side. The steeple head-dress, with a long veil hanging down behind, was also in fashion in this century. A French moralist said: 'One manner of spoiling and abusing one's vestments is as to the form, which, as regards women, I consider in four parts. The first is the head, which used to be horned, but is now mitred in these parts of France. . . . And now these mitres are in the shape of chimneys. . . . And the more beautiful and younger the wearer, the higher chimneys they carry.' In the sixteenth century, ladies wore kennel-shaped bonnets; afterwards, small circular caps; and then a kind of close linen cap, projecting forward at each side of the face, often with a jewelled fillet over the forehead, and a lappet dependent behind. At the end of the century, the hair was brushed back from the temples, and the French hood had the lappet at the back thrown forward over the top of the head; and broad-brimmed hats were worn, which were much used among the Puritans in the seventeenth century. A calash or hood was also used.

Mr Rimmell, in his *Book of Perfumes*, says that there are three styles principally adopted by a Chinese lady for dressing her hair, which styles indicate whether she is a maid, wife, or widow. From her infancy to her marriage, a young girl wears the back part of her hair braided into a tail, and the remainder combed over her forehead, and cut into the shape of a crescent. On her wedding-day, her head is decorated with a crown covered with tinsel-paper; and on the next day her hair is dressed for the first time in the well-known *teapot* style. On holidays, she ornaments it with flowers. When she becomes a widow, she shaves part of her head, and binds round it a fillet, fastened with numerous bodkins, which are sometimes very costly. The men shave their heads, keeping only on the summit a long tuft of hair, of which they are very proud, although it was originally a mark of their subjection to the Tartars.

The Abyssinian ladies and gentlemen put a great deal of rancid butter on their heads. The Bedouin Arabs of Mount Sinai have their hair plaited and

so arranged as to resemble a horn placed on the forehead. The Fejee Islanders dye their hair blue, red, and yellow, in patches; and the natives of the Duke of York's Island smear it with grease, and then sprinkle it with coloured powders. In the Britannia Islands, people take a good deal of trouble to make their black hair look white.

Poor Louis VII., at the instigation of his bishops, shaved his hair and beard; but Eleanor, his consort, so disliked his appearance, that she soon afterwards obtained a divorce. In the reign of Henry VIII., the women, as well as the men, are in portraits represented with very little hair; but the latter made up for it in the length of their beards. In the twenty-fifth *Coventry Mystery*, we read: 'With syde lokkys I schrewe their here to thy coleer hanging down.'

In Medwall's *Interlude of Nature*, Pride, one of the characters, says:

I love it well to have syde [broad] hair  
Half a foot beneath mine ear,  
For ever more I stand in fear  
That thy neck should take cold.  
I knit it up all the night,  
And the daytime comb it down right,  
And then it crispeth, and shineth as bright  
As any pyried gold.

Fairholt, in his *History of Costume*, engraves a portrait of Sir Thomas Meauty (*temp.* James I.), representing that gentleman wearing a love-lock reaching to his elbow. The Puritans denounced long hair with great virulence. Dr Hall, in 1643, says: 'Some men have long locks at their eares, as if they had foure eares, or were prick-eared; some have a little long lock only before, hanging downe to their noses, like the taile of a weasall; every man being made a foole at the barber's pleasure, or making a foole of the barber for having to make him such a foole.' The same writer wrote a book on the *Loathsomenesse of Long Haire*, in 1654. Fletcher, in his *Purple Island*, thus alludes to love-locks:

A long love-lock on his left shoulder plight,  
Like to a woman's hair, well shewed a woman's  
sprite.

A song printed in 1641, entitled *The Character of a Roundhead*, thus commences:

What creature's this, with his short hairs,  
His little band, and huge long ears,  
That this new faith hath found?  
The Puritans were never such,  
The Saints themselves had ne'er so much:  
Oh, such a knave's a Roundhead!

In Southerne's play, *The Disappointment*, the Roundheads are described as

The zealous of the land,  
With little hair, and little or no band.

Brides were always married with the hair dishevelled. In Middleton's *Roaring Girl* (1611), we read:

Untie your folded thoughts,  
And let them dangle loose as a bride's hair.

Shakspeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*, says: 'Her sunny locks hang on her temples like the golden fleece.' He only mentions black hair twice throughout his entire plays. Every one who walks through any large collection of works of the old masters, the National Gallery, for example, must have noticed the remarkable absence of black heads.

Before noticing *wigs*, we must say a word on the ladies' head-dresses of the eighteenth century. About 1760, the fair sex wore them towering about three feet above their heads. Hairdressers considered that when thus decked they would keep for three weeks; but insects soon bred in the flour and pomatum with which they were bedaubed, and receipts for killing them are given in the newspapers of the period. For fear of disarranging these ponderous head-dresses, ladies frequently slept in chairs, instead of going to bed. The managers of theatres complained that those seated behind could not see the performance by reason of the large head-dresses in front; and in a caricature called 'A new Opera-glass for 1777,' a gentleman is represented looking through one of the great curls by the side of a lady's head, using it for an opera-glass:

Behold how Jemmy treats the fair,  
And makes a telescope of hair!  
How will this suit high-headed lasses,  
If curls are turned to optic glasses!

The head-dresses were happily reduced about 1790, and soon declined altogether.

Louis XIII. wore his hair very long, and wigs were invented to allow his courtiers who were not so favoured by nature to follow the fashion of the king. In the reign of Louis XIV., perukes were made of vast size, and even children wore them. Full-bottomed wigs were invented by the French barber Duviller, for the purpose of concealing an elevation in the shoulder of the Dauphin. The earliest notice of periwigs occurs in the privy purse expenses of Henry VIII., where we find, under December 1529, an entry of twenty shillings 'for a *perwyke* for Sexton, the king's fool.' By the middle of the century, their use became frequent. Enormous periwigs were worn *temp.* Charles II.

Pepys, November 3, 1663, says: 'By-and-bye comes Chapman, the perriwig-maker, and upon my liking it [the wig] without more ado I went up, and then he cut off my haire, which went a little to my heart at present to part with it; but, it being over, and my perriwig on, I paid him L.3, and away went he with my own haire to make up another of; and I by-and-bye went abroad, after I had caused all my maids to look upon it, and they concluded it do become me, though Jane was mightily troubled for my parting with my own haire, and so was Besse.' Five days after, the same dear old gossip appeared at church in his wig, but he says it did not create a sensation, as he feared it would.

Up to 1714, wigs were made of the natural colour of the hair, but after that date they were bleached; but as they looked after a time a dirty gray, *hair-powder* came into use, to make them look white; that is, it was then applied to wigs, but had been in use long before, being, as some think, introduced by Marie de Medici; at anyrate, it is mentioned by L'Etoile in 1593.

In a satire on the ladies in the *Musarum Deliciae* (1655), they are thus addressed:

At the devil's shops you buy  
A dresse of powdered hayre,  
On which your feathers flaunt and fly,  
But I'de wish you have a care  
Lest Lucifer's selfe, who is not prouder,  
Do one day dresse up your hayre with a powder.

A writer in the *Monthly Magazine* (1806) says,

that Charles James Fox, c. 1770, actually used *blue* hair-powder—'he had his chapeau bras, his red-heeled shoes, and his *blue hair-powder*.'

Pitt taxed hair-powder in 1795, and its use soon declined. Pigtailed succeeded, and were generally worn in the army, but in 1808 were ordered to be cut off altogether, to the great delight of the military world.

More than one hundred tons of hair are annually taken at Paris. A great deal of this comes from Brittany, where the girls cover the head with a white cap, and the absence of their beautiful black ringlets is not noticed. Mr Francis Trollope, in his *Summer in Brittany*, tells us what he saw at a fair in Collenée. 'What surprised me more than all were the operations of the dealers in hair. There seemed to be no difficulty in finding possessors of beautiful heads of hair perfectly willing to sell. We saw several girls sheared, one after the other, like sheep, and as many more standing ready for the shears, with their caps in their hands, and their long hair combed out and hanging to their waists. By the side of the dealer was placed a large basket, into which every successive crop of hair, tied up into a wisp by itself, was thrown. No doubt the reason of the indifference to their tresses, on the part of the fair Bretonnes, is to be found in the invariable "mode" which covers every head, from childhood upwards, with close caps, which entirely prevents any part of the hair from being seen, and, of course, as totally conceals the want of it. The money given for the hair is about twenty sous, or else a gaudy cotton handkerchief. They net immense profits by their trip through the country.'

In the Exhibition of 1862, Messrs Hovenden exhibited a head of hair six feet long, from the head of an English lady.

Another source of false hair is the combings of the ladies of Paris. The *chiffonier* picks out the hair from the heaps in the gutters as he goes his rounds, and this is sold to the hair-merchant.

Dr Wynter thinks that a good deal of false hair is obtained by the gravediggers from the corpses, as a kind of hair called 'churchyard hair' is well known to the merchants. Golden hair now sells for about fifteen shillings the ounce.

## A GREAT JEWEL-ROBBERY.

### IN TWO CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

SOME years ago, people used to prophesy that in consequence of the Californian gold discovery the precious metal would be precious no longer, but fall to a par with, if not below, silver in value. But in spite of the golden treasures of California, supplemented by those of Australia, a sovereign is still worth its twenty shillings; and the reports of progress in Sutherlandshire are not sufficiently promising to make the favoured of us mortals who indulge in such luxuries to exchange our golden ornaments for their present value before it deteriorates. But, as a dealer in precious stones, I have often thought of what would be the consequence should some tremendous deposit of diamonds be laid bare; for we are not bound to suppose that these precious crystals of carbon are everywhere so sparsely scattered over the earth's surface as to render the quest one of patience and difficulty. Imagine, for instance, some pebbly mountain



stream, whose pebbles were all Koh-i-noors, Stars of the South, and Great Pitt Diamonds! What consternation amongst the holders of family heirlooms, whose glittering clusters have been handed down from generation to generation, and valued at so many thousands sterling—what horror to find that, by the glut in the market, those thousands sank to hundreds, to tens, to units at last, or merely the value of the cutting! That lady who described the wearing of diamonds as an exquisite pleasure, but too painful, from the risks incurred, would be then able to wear her precious jewels in peace.

There is a strange, and too often a fearful history attached to every great gem of price, many of which, while flashing on the brow of beauty, or in some regal or imperial ornament, are dimmed to the thoughtful mind by the tears shed over them, or by the blood in which they have too often been bathed. Robbery and murder have ever been mingled with the stories of precious gems; and as a peaceful man, living in these highly civilised times, I have more than once felt my life to be far from safe as soon as it was known that in the little black leathern case I carried, or even in the scrap of tissue-paper in my waistcoat pocket, I held so many valuable diamonds, rubies, or sapphires.

One gets used to it in time; but at first there is a strong feeling that every person who looks at you, or says a word about the weather, is bent upon murder and robbery. You live a solitary life during your travels. You get in the farthest corners of carriages. You would not ride alone in a first-class coupe, with some strange traveller, upon any consideration, even if that strange traveller were a feeble old woman, since you would certainly suppose her to be a ruffian in disguise. Elegantly dressed ladies become swindlers' accomplices; clerical gentlemen, the swindlers themselves; and distrust of everything and everybody becomes the bane of your existence. Your wine or tea seems to be drugged, your food poisoned; and once, at an hotel where I was staying, I had serious thoughts about giving the proprietor into custody for supplying me with medicated soap.

I will not mention the name of the Bond Street firm with which I was some years ago connected, but let it suffice that their name was well known, and that the manufacture of more than one regal diadem had been intrusted to their skilled workmen. I was with them some twelve or fourteen years, and it was during that period that the incident I am about to relate occurred. As a matter of course, the strictest injunctions respecting care, caution, and watchfulness are issued to all the employés, especially to those whose daily business brings them into contact with the public; and being always in the show-rooms myself, I was one of those in whom the elders of the firm placed confidence. The consequence was, that being tolerably thoughtful, sharp of eye, and a good judge of gems, I rose to occupy one of the most responsible positions, and to me were always intrusted those rather delicate, critical, and caution-demanding embassies, where customers wished for jewels to be sent to their houses for inspection.

In course of time, a little feeling of jealousy sprang up; but it did not trouble me, for, either from extra care, or from good fortune, I had not in any single case been the cause of loss to my employers—a state of satisfaction hardly to be

enjoyed by either of my brother-assistants, so many, so ingenious, and so carefully contrived were, in those days, the plans for defrauding the great jewellers. I do not know that any very great improvement has taken place of late years; but my experience is with the past, and I relate accordingly. In fact, so many were the tricks, that when a visitor came to the show-rooms, the first question we had to ask was: 'Is this a lady or a sharper?'

Very often the swindlers, or thieves, were easy to detect; for though dressed in the extreme of fashion, and arriving perhaps in a brougham, there would be some slip of the tongue—some vulgarity—which would betray them. Frequently, a misplaced *h*, or a wrongly applied verb, has raised suspicions, which defeated a carefully planned swindle, and sent the disappointed ones to lament their ill success, or often to jail. But with all care, the jewellers' enemies are so many, and their losses so heavy, that, in spite of enormous profits, the balance-sheets at the end of the year are not so satisfactory as is supposed for those who follow this artistic business. Now a well-dressed couple would come and look at some rings, turn them over for half an hour, and then leave, declaring that there was nothing to suit; when perhaps before, more often after, their departure, one or two valuable gems have been missed—taken no one could tell how. Twice over, assistants allowed jewels to be taken into the next room, at some hotel, to shew a sick lady, and came back ruefully to announce the sick, as well as the sound, lady had disappeared. Times out of number, ring, chain, or bracelet has been snatched from counter or table; once such a thing happened when I was in waiting, but a presented pistol stopped the marauder before he reached the door—a door already bolted by the porter; and my friend was committed for trial, and afterwards transported. One select company of visitors purchased goods to the amount of nine hundred pounds, when the gentleman of the party wrote a cheque on the spot for the amount—Drummonds of Charing Cross being his bankers—but as I objected to the jewels being taken away until the cheque was honoured, I was courteously told to send them to Morley's Hotel, and half sorry to be compelled to shew the distrust, I bowed the distinguished customers out.

'Here, Johnson,' I said to one of our men, 'run down at once to Drummonds, and present this cheque; take a cab.'

In half an hour Johnson was back with the cheque branded with the words 'No effects.'

I received an invitation to dine with the head of our firm after that, and returned home at night wearing a very handsome gold watch. 'A reward for your shrewdness,' said the old gentleman, clapping me on the shoulder. 'You'll be in the firm yet, Willis, that you will.'

'I hope I may,' I thought, as I went home that night; but the happy consummation never arrived, since I was but mortal, and, like other men, liable to be deceived; though, upon maturer consideration, I don't think I was very well used.

I was seated one day busily examining some stones which were to be reset for the Countess of Maraschino, when the principal came softly in.

'Lock those up, Willis,' he said, 'and go and attend to those parties in the front show-room. Thomas is with them, and I don't half like their looks.'

I hurried into the show-room to relieve Mr Thomas of his task, which he gave up with a very bad grace, and proceeded to listen to the demands of a tall lady and gentleman in black, both of whom wore respirators, and spoke in low husky voices. The gentleman looked very pale and ill, and the lady was very closely veiled as to the upper part of her face; but upon my approach she threw up her fall, and displayed the bright bold eyes of a very handsome woman.

'Don't look suspicious,' I thought, as I evaded the glance directed at me; for our rule is not to look at eyes, but hands—or rather fingers, which sometimes turn out to be light. In this case, though, the lady's were *bien gentée*, and the gentleman's thin, white, and soft—an invalid's hands, in fact, and I proceeded to listen to their demands.

'Well, Lilla, what's it to be?' said the gentleman.

'I thought you had decided, love,' was the reply. 'Something simple, and not too expensive now, whatever we may decide upon hereafter. Why not keep to what you said—a bracelet, or a cross?'

'Well, shew me some bracelets,' the gentleman said. 'We do not want anything of high price, but something pretty, light, and suited for a young lady of eighteen, about to be married.'

I proceeded to open case after case of bracelets of all prices, from ten to five hundred guineas each; but though they were fastidious and hard to please, I was bound to confess that the lady's taste was excellent, and that the gentleman was no mean connoisseur in gems.

'I rather like that,' said the gentleman at last, selecting a very pretty but slight bracelet, set with a sapphire, surrounded by pearls. 'What is the price?'

'That is sixty guineas,' I said.

'Yes, it's pretty enough,' said the lady; 'but not sufficiently good.'

'You mean not valuable enough,' said the gentleman; 'but you know the old proverb about the gift-horse. Lucille will not study the value, depend upon it; and, besides, I don't see anything I like half so well.'

'Have it then, dear,' was the reply; and then, directly after, 'Ah, what a sweet cross!' exclaimed the lady, looking at an enamel and gold ornament lying in a case—and which I immediately opened—for I must confess I had almost forgotten our principal's suspicions.

'It is a sweet little thing!' exclaimed the lady, examining the cross; 'such a fine pearl, too, in the centre. I should like it.'

'What, to give to Lucille?' said the gentleman smiling.

'No; of course not. I fancied it myself.'

'My dear Lilla, this is not a linendraper's shop,' said the gentleman with a shrug, and then there was a smile and a whisper between them.

'What is the price of the cross?' said the gentleman at last.

'Fifty guineas,' I said.

'It seems a good deal for so small an ornament,' said the gentleman, turning and re-turning the cross; but I explained that the size of the pearls increased its value; and after a little hesitation, he decided to take it, when I saw that he was rewarded by a quiet pressure of the hand from his companion, whose eyes then met mine almost mirthfully for a moment.

'You're a nice creature, I expect,' muttered I to myself; 'coax him out of everything you fancy, and then laugh in your sleeve.' But my eyes were wanted to guard the valuable assortment of jewellery displayed, and they were back the next instant to business.

'Where can I send these, sir?' I inquired.

'Ah! we'll take them,' said the lady; 'we will not trouble you to send.'

I explained that it would be no trouble, but they held to their determination; and upon payment being requested, the gentleman drew out a cheque-book, asked for pen and ink, and wrote a cheque for one hundred and ten guineas upon a small city bank.

Now it was that my lips became a little tighter, and I felt that the principal had had some cause for his suspicions; and thoroughly on my guard, I took the cheque, and explained that it was a rule of the establishment that goods should not be delivered until after a cheque had been presented.

'Ah, quite right, quite right,' said the gentleman quietly, and without displaying the slightest annoyance. 'I can easily suppose that you are obliged to be careful.'

But the lady looked angry, and returned my bow very distantly, as I ushered them out, having promised to send the purchases on to the fashionable hotel—Moore's, in Brook Street—at which they were staying.

'All a farce, but well carried out,' I said to the principal as he came up to me, and I shewed him the cheque and the card given me, bearing the name 'Mr H. Elliston Ross,' and in pencil, 'Moore's Hotel.' 'But we'll send the cheque all the same.—Here, Johnson.'

The principal shrugged his shoulders; and as Johnson came up to where I was carefully running over the various items of jewellery, to see that nothing had been stolen, I gave him the cheque, and he went cityward.

To my great satisfaction, all was right; not a jewel missing, and the purchased cases lying by me. Suddenly, a cold chill shot through me. Had they contrived to abstract the contents? I tore the little morocco boxes open; but, no—all was correct. Cross and bracelet lay upon their white velvet beds; and so far, everything was perfectly satisfactory. If they were swindlers, we had escaped; and I began to wonder whether I should get another invitation to dinner, a chain for my watch, and be told that I was a step nearer to the junior partnership.

To our intense astonishment, though, at an hour's end, Johnson returned smiling.

'All right, sir,' he said.

'Why, you don't mean'—

'All right, sir,' he said. 'Cheque cashed in an instant: hundred and fifteen pounds, ten shillings.'

It is almost needless to add that the two little cases were sent immediately to the hotel, and a discussion followed respecting unnecessary suspicion, and how very often it happened that swindlers passed unnoticed, while honest people were suspected.

## CHAPTER II.

A month passed, when one cold January day I was in the show-room, and the same lady made

her appearance alone. She still wore her respirator, but looked very pale, haggard, and troubled. The bold look seemed to have gone from her eyes; and as I recalled my thoughts, I felt that I had misjudged her, for she began to speak tenderly of her husband, Mr Ross, who was lying very ill at the hotel.

'I have brought back the cross to be repaired,' she said, drawing the little morocco case from her rich sable muff. 'The ring was too slight, and it broke from my necklet the second time it was worn. I had a narrow escape of losing it; but Mr Ross found it himself upon the lawn, trodden into the grass. I thought I would leave it until we came up again. Of course, you can repair it?'

I expressed my sorrow, and promised to have it seen to at once.

'You need not hurry for a few days. Mr Ross is in town to consult Sir Ealing Dean, and I fear he will send us to Madeira. This climate is killing my poor husband.'

The distant hauteur was all gone; and in a ladylike, courteous manner, our customer bowed to my few sympathetic remarks, and hints of its being an unusually trying season, &c.

'Our friend was delighted with the little bracelet, a gift which Mr Ross wishes to supplement with something a little more valuable. Perhaps I could be allowed to select a few things for you to submit to his choice at the hotel? I know his taste now pretty well, and it will save trouble.'

'Anything you like to select shall be sent, ma'am,' I said; and I then proceeded to open and display to their best advantage some very valuable bracelets, which were one and all rejected.

'Yes,' she said sadly, 'they are very handsome; but Mr Ross would not like them, I am sure, and it is useless to take things on that he would not approve. His taste was always good; and as his health fails, it seems to have acquired an indescribable tone that I cannot explain, except that it is artistic, and dreamy.'

I brought out some plain but good pearl and diamond ornaments in suites, one suite in particular taking her attention.

'Yes; I like that. You might send that.'

'It is a suite made to order; but it could be made again in a very short time,' I said.

'That would not do,' she said, 'unless it could be supplied in a fortnight.'

'I think we could get over that difficulty,' I said with a smile; and then bracelets, rings, chains, and watches—certainly the most chaste and elegant we had—were selected and put aside.

'It is only fair to say,' said the lady smiling—at least, I could see that she was smiling, in spite of her respirator—that Mr Ross will not purchase many of these elegant ornaments. I know he would like a watch and chain, and a ring. Perhaps, too, if he admired them, one of those pearl suites; but I thought it better to speak, as since his illness he has become, not irritable—but—perhaps a little hard to please, and I should be sorry if he rejected everything you brought.'

So much delicacy was displayed in these remarks, that I could only courteously assure her that we should only be too happy to attend again and again upon Mr Ross, till we had hit upon something he admired; and upon promising to send the selected goods on the next morning at eleven, our visitor rose to go.

'I would ask you to send this afternoon,' said the lady, on rising, 'but I don't think Mr Ross quite well enough. He saw our physician this morning, and the interviews are always very trying to his nerves.'

I placed the little cross in the workmen's hands for repair; and the next morning, punctually at eleven, I was at Moore's Hotel, accompanied by a porter with a goodly assortment of jewellery.

A few words with the manager set me quite at ease, though my inquiries were a mere matter of form. Mr Elliston Ross lived in Yorkshire, owned coal mines, and was in town to visit the court physician, Sir Ealing Dean; had been there once before for the same reason: perfect gentleman; his lady quite an angel—waited on him night and day.

I was shewn into the room where Mrs Ross was seated—this time without her respirator. She rose with a sad smile, and motioned me to a seat; while putting on her respirator, she went into the next room, remaining absent a few minutes; and then returning, requested me to bring in my cases for Mr Ross to see.

I had left the porter down-stairs; so, taking up the two small leathern boxes, I followed Mrs Ross into a slightly shaded room, where, looking deathly pale, the gentleman who had visited our place of business lay upon a couch reading the *Times*. He was attired in a blue cloth dressing-gown, and had a small table drawn up to his side, on which were a bottle, glass, and a carafe which seemed to contain barley-water. He too wore a respirator; but he removed it for a few moments to take a little of the barley-water, and then carefully replaced it, coughing hollowly the while.

'Sorry to bring you into a sick-room,' he said courteously. 'Sorry, in fact, to bring you here at all, for I would much rather have chosen the trifle or two I wanted at your shop. I trust you have not brought many things, though?'

'Only a few that Mrs Ross thought you—that your lady chose, sir,' I said.

He nodded, and then listlessly examined first one and then another ornament, as I opened them out, but always with a dissatisfied air.

'Don't you like those, dear?' said Mrs Ross, in rather disappointed tones, as I displayed in the best lights the pearl suite.

'No; not at all,' said the invalid. 'Too plain; almost vulgar.'

'Might I be allowed to suggest,' I said earnestly, 'that to see pearls to advantage, they must be worn. It is a well-known fact that pearls are gems which shew to as great advantage upon a dark as upon a fair complexion; and if your lady—'

I paused here, and glanced towards Mrs Ross, who smiled graciously, and then clasped the bracelets round her shapely wrist, the necklace over her fine throat, and placed the tiara in her hair—looking almost regal as she stood before us.

'You see the difference,' I said, drawing back.

'Yes, yes,' said the invalid impatiently; 'they look well enough on her; but they are for quite a girl.—Take them off, Lilla.'

Mrs Ross obeyed, and the ornaments were replaced in the case; when I proceeded to display the other jewels, but apparently to find no favour.

'Here, Lilla, give me a glass of sherry.—'

Confound this thing, it almost chokes me.' He tore off the respirator, and hurled it to the other end of the room.

'For my sake, dear,' I heard her whisper to him, as, stepping lightly across the room, she picked up the respirator, and brought it back.

'Well, there; get out the sherry, then,' he said pettishly, as he took back the instrument.

'No, no, dear; Sir Ealing said'—

'Confound Sir Ealing! If I am to die, let me die comfortably, and not be tortured to death. Get out the sherry, I say—the port too.'

I saw a tear trickle down Mrs Ross's cheek as she fetched a couple of decanters from a side-board where they stood with glasses.

'Haven't you some cake, or did you send it down?' he said impatiently.

'I have it here, dear,' said Mrs Ross softly; and she placed a portion of a small pound-cake upon the table.

'Give me a glass of sherry,' he said impatiently. —'No, not that glass—the other.—Mr—I don't know your name—try that sherry.' He sipped a little. 'You'll find it very good.'

'I thank you,' I said quietly; 'but I never take wine in business hours.'

'Won't you try the port, then?' he said.

'I would much rather not,' I replied.

'A little cake!' suggested the lady. 'We are simple country people, and not much acquainted with London etiquette. Pray, excuse us if we trespass.'

I bowed, and declined, when Mrs Ross readjusted her husband's respirator, leaning over him the while.

'Now, let me see that bracelet,' said Mr Ross, pointing to one upon the table.—'But are these all you have brought?'

'Yes, sir,' I said; 'but I can easily bring a fresh selection'—though I had brought over two thousand pounds' worth.

'Hem, yes,' he said; 'of course!—Do you like that bracelet, Lilla?'

'Yes,' said Mrs Ross; 'I picked it out particularly yesterday. That emerald is so beautiful.'

'Put it on,' he said curtly; and she clasped it upon her arm.

'How much?' he said shortly.

'Thirty-five guineas,' I replied.

'Dear,' he said—'very dear. The bracelet we bought at the shop was far more handsome at the same money.'

'No, love; it was sixty guineas,' said Mrs Ross.

'Ah! was it? I forgot,' he said carelessly.

'Well, lay that aside: I don't want you to come for nothing.'

I hastened to assure him that it was the wish of the firm to satisfy their patrons, as well as to sell their jewellery, and that we should only be too happy to bring or send on a fresh selection for his choice.

He assented almost rudely, and turned over the various rings, asking the prices of nearly every article I had brought, when, suddenly throwing himself impatiently back, he exclaimed: 'Good heavens, Lilla, this room is insufferable; throw some of that vinegar about.'

Mrs Ross smiled faintly; and taking a flexible tube from the mantelpiece, she pressed it, so that in a fine shower a finely scented aromatic vinegar diffused a refreshing perfume through the room.

'That's better,' he exclaimed.—'Now, shew me those pearls again. How much did you say they were?'

'Four hundred guineas the suite,' I said, hastening to lay them before him.

'There, take them away!' he exclaimed. 'I can't afford four hundred guineas: four hundred shillings more likely. That confounded doctor is ruining me. Let me look at the watches; or, stay, let me look at the pearls again.—No; never mind. I won't have them unless you will take half the money.'

I smiled and shook my head. 'We are not dealers of that sort, sir,' I ventured to say.

'I don't know—I don't know. I believe you jewellers get most terrible profits. Shew me the watches.'

I was hastening to place the half-dozen I had with me in his hands, when he exclaimed again: 'Insufferable! Have you any more of that vinegar, Lilla?'

Mrs Ross nodded; and taking a cut-glass bottle from her pocket, she placed it with a handkerchief by his side.

'No, no,' he said, giving me back the watches. Sprinkle the room with another of those tubes.—Now, you! I'll have that little plain watch. I'm getting tired of this. Let me have a chain to match—a fine one, mind—the thinnest you have—and that will do for to-day.'

As I selected four or five chains, after putting the watch aside, Mrs Ross took up another tube, unscrewed it, and then appeared to be taking especial notice of the chains which I bore across to the invalid.

'Those are sweetly pretty,' she exclaimed. 'I don't remember noticing them so much yesterday.'

As she spoke, she stood close to my side, when the invalid exclaimed impatiently: 'There, pray, be quick dear; and at one and the same moment, he poured out the contents of his bottle upon his handkerchief, and I felt a fine spray of a peculiar odour playing right in my nostrils.

I started back, gasping and astounded, when, leaping from the couch, the invalid exclaimed: 'Good heavens, sir, you are unwell;' and he covered my face and nose with the wet handkerchief, forcing me backwards into a chair.

I believe that I struggled, but only feebly; for a strange, delicious, enervating languor was stealing over me; I saw things mistily, but still with an understanding mind, seeing, though unable to move hand or foot, that the invalid was bending over me, while Mrs Ross was hastily placing the various articles of jewellery in her pocket.

I saw all that, but in a dreamy untroubled way, for it seemed then to be not of the slightest consequence—not to concern me. Then I have some recollection of an intensely cold sensation as of water being poured upon my face, while my next impression is of hearing a closing door and the click of a lock.

How long I remained in that condition, I never knew; but by degrees I woke to a feeling of deadly nausea: my head swam, my temples throbbed, and everything I gazed upon was seen through a mist of dancing motes. But by degrees thoughts of the present began to take the place of the dreamy imaginings of the past. I started up and looked around, to find that I was still in the



inner room; but the jewels—the cases—where was the invalid—where Mrs Ross? Was it true, or was it some strange vision? It was impossible that I could have been duped like that.

I ran to the door—fastened. The other door—locked on the outside. I darted across to the bell, but in doing so, caught my foot in the long table-cover, tripped and fell, dragging the cloth on to the carpet, and revealing the whole of the jewel-cases beneath the table, just as they had been hastily flung.

I could not help it then, for my brain was confused, and stooping down, I took the cases one by one, and opened them, in the fond hope that I had been deceived, and that I should find the jewels safe; but, save one ring, which had escaped their notice, everything had been taken.

I sat on the carpet for a few minutes holding my throbbing head, and trying to recall the scene, but almost in vain, for it seemed as if a portion of my existence had been wiped completely away. I was shewing jewellery at one moment, the next it seemed that I was seated by the empty cases. I tried to clear my faculties, but in vain; and I should think quite half an hour had elapsed before, thoroughly awakened to the fact that I had been robbed, I rang the bell.

I had nearly arrived at the extent of my loss two or three times, but only to have, as it were, a veil drawn over my senses, just as if a relapse were coming on; and then mentally blind, I could do nothing but rock myself to and fro, trying to get rid of the remains of the strange stupor in which I had been plunged.

Before the waiter could ascend, I rang again.

'Where are Mr and Mrs Ross?' I inquired.

'Went out in a brougham some time ago, sir; and your lunch is ready.'

'My lunch!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, sir; the lunch they ordered for you.'

'Oh, thank you!' I said quietly; 'I'll ring again. Send my porter up in five minutes' time.'

The waiter did not seem surprised that the door was fastened on the outside—it had not struck him then; but as soon as he had gone, I hastily repacked the empty morocco cases, and as soon as possible made my way back into Bond Street, and met the principal.

'We were just getting uneasy, Mr Willis, and going to send after you. What have they taken?'

'Everything, sir,' I said almost fiercely.

'What!' he exclaimed.

I told all I knew, while he listened with blank amazement.

Then followed a visit to Great Scotland Yard, and to Moore's, to find that Mr and Mrs Ross had not returned; while so impressed was the manager with his visitors' respectability, that he laughed at the idea of there having been any swindling transaction. They were most respectable people, he said; paid their bill last time without a murmur; their portmanteaus and boxes up-stairs were all in their rooms; and it was all a mistake—'or something worse,' he added with a dark look at me.

That it was 'something worse,' was very soon evident, from the tubes and bottles, and a wine-glass containing a few drops of a limpid fluid, found to corroborate my story. But though the instruments of the deception, even to a couple of respirators, lined with wet sponge, were found, the depredators had made their escape, and were

never found; though I verily believe that if I had watched the lady-swindlers in the various police courts, sooner or later I should have encountered the interesting Mrs Ross.

I need hardly add, that after so heavy a loss, the firm never seemed to take thoroughly to heart the ideas of a junior partnership with respect to myself; while as to my brother assistants, they laughed in their sleeves at my downfall; though, after all, I cannot see that I was much to blame, this not being by any means the first Great Jewel-robbery.

### THE RING AND THE BOOK.

MR BROWNING has been before the world for some five-and-thirty years, and it is not too much to say that the world as yet does not know him. We do not speak of popularity such as attends the verses of the immortal Tupper, but of the measured and judicious approval of the educated public. And yet Mr Browning has not been left to pine away in unnoticed obscurity, nor has he been the victim of savage and indiscriminate abuse. He has received notices from time to time in the leading reviews, not fierce onslaughts such as those which in the good old days of the *Edinburgh* sent Keats despairing to an early tomb, but fair and reasonable criticism, whether conveying praise or blame. Nor is it alone that he has held on his way, as all true genius must, conscious of something within him, an individuality which he must make acceptable if possible, but certainly must not surrender. Mr Tennyson has done this also, and passed through the sneers and sarcasms of twenty years ago, to the glories of an established position and the laureate's crown. The

Argosies of magic sails,

Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales,

and similar stumbling-blocks to unsympathising reviewers, have been forgotten in the sublimity of *Guinevere* and the pathos of *Enoch Arden*. The truth appears to be, with respect to Mr Browning, that his poetry possesses merits which, though certain of ultimate appreciation, yet are not in accordance with the poetical taste and fashion of the age, and therefore are slow of recognition; and partly also that he has a certain perverse attachment for whatever is obscure, subtle, and remote from ordinary experience in the characters which he conceives, and the situations through which he conducts them.

Now, obscurity, whether in conception or expression, is a blemish, and a just hindrance to popularity. When a preacher complains that he is unappreciated, because his sermons fly above the heads of his hearers, we generally suspect that it is not so much the heads as the hearts that are missed, not the superfluity of intellect, but the lack of interest which formed the defect of his preaching. It is easy to say something original and striking when the subject is so remote from human interest that no one has cared to tread the same path before us, but then there is this little compensatory drawback, that an equal indifference may be accorded to what we have said or written. No theme was too mean, trite, or common-place for Shakespeare's genius. He ventured boldly upon the most obvious motives and the most ordinary situations. Love, ambition, avarice,

jealousy, and fraud were the homely materials with which he laboured, and he has met with his reward. It is neither surprising nor unjust that curious psychological studies like *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* should fail in obtaining similar recognition, even though in their development they manifested an equal power of thought and breadth of sympathy. So far, therefore, as Mr Browning's want of general appreciation is due to this cause, there is nothing to be said against it. We cannot regard that man as so great an artist whose powers can only be stimulated into action by some forced, subtle, and almost unreal conception of character and incident, as he who can shed over ordinary life the elevating rays of true artistic treatment. But, so far as Mr Browning suffers from his want of accordance with the poetical taste of the century, we can only hail him as a martyr, and a martyr in a cause where one was sorely needed.

If we except Scott, and still more Coleridge in England, and Goethe in Germany, we have since the beginning of the century been in the hands of the subjective school of poets. Poets, that is, who view the universe of men and things through a medium supplied by their own idiosyncrasies, and whose poetry comes to us savouring strongly of the mind and heart of the individual poet. Against this style of poetry Mr Browning's works supply a welcome and long desired reaction. More productive than Coleridge, and far surpassing Scott in delicacy of touch and finished treatment, we find him free from Mr Ruskin's 'pathetic fallacy,' which attempts to depict external nature by investing it with human characters, and then painting it according to the tone of the artist's mind. In scenery, he gives us things as he sees them; and in dramatic poetry, which he chiefly loves, he thinks out his characters to the very heart's core, and then makes them speak for themselves, without coming forward like a chorus to explain the situation or scatter moral reflections over the drama. But it is in the work now before us that Mr Browning's genius reaches the culminating point. Henceforth, his place in the very first rank of English poets must be conceded without a murmur or a doubt. He has added a new lustre to English literature, and enriched our language with a possession for ever. In Count Guido, Caponsacchi, and especially in Pompilia, we have distinct creations, characters which stand forth in clearness and completeness like Macbeth, Hamlet, or Cordelia. Pompilia is exquisite in her beauty, her unconscious grandeur and nobility of soul, her simplicity, and withal her dignity, maintained alike amid great sufferings and petty persecutions more lowering than sublime trials. We cannot point to a creation worthy of being compared with her in the whole range of English literature. For the choice of subject we have nothing but condemnation. It is Mr Browning's luck. But granting this, there is no mark of great and lofty poetry wanting in the elaboration of this noble masterpiece. There is no departure from the true concrete artistic treatment in any line of the whole poem; no putting aside the poet for the didactic teacher; no thrusting forward of the author's individuality to speak for the characters, or to interpret them to his readers.

Repulsive though it be, however, we must set some abstract of the story before our readers, or it will be impossible to convey to them by quotation

any real idea of the beauty of the poem. It is based on the trial at Rome, some two hundred years ago, of one Count Guido Franceschini, for the murder of his wife Pompilia, and her foster-parents Pietro and Violante. Guido justifies his deed on the ground of the shameless profligacy of his wife with one Caponsacchi, a priest in whose company she had fled to Rome, the husband overtaking them while resting at an inn at the last stage. Nor was this his only grievance, for his wife had been palmed off upon him as the child of Pietro and Violante, and the cheat afterwards disclosed, with the view of defrauding him of the dowry. The wife's friends admit the original fraud, in which the wife was an ignorant and unconscious innocent; and charge the husband with ill-treatment of his wife, too gross to be described, including incentives to unfaithfulness with Caponsacchi, so that, in despair, she was driven to commit herself to the priest's protection, with the most saint-like purity of act and intention on either side throughout. The law courts compromise, suspend Caponsacchi, send him to retirement, and Pompilia to a convent—whence, after a few weeks, she is removed to the villa of her foster-parents, gives birth to a boy, and is attacked and murdered by Guido and his associates—surviving only long enough to tell her tale. All this the poet finds recorded in an old book full of Latin pleadings. His aim is to set the story before us instinct with renewed life. We have the arguments of the husband's partisans among the gossips of the Roman bourgeoisie, then those of the wife's, and finally the epigrammatic comments of the gilded saloons—the contrast being worked out with consummate skill between the uncompromising partisanship of the two former classes, and the pseudo-philosophy of the last—with their affected superiority to passionate emotion, and their scepticism of the possibility of discovering a black and white, a right and wrong side in any quarrel. Then come the statements of the principal actors—Caponsacchi, Pompilia on her death-bed, and Guido after torture, the pleadings of the advocates, the final sentence of the pope, and the last utterances of Guido. The two lawyers we could well dispense with; they constitute the marked blemish of the whole piece. The humorous interludes in deep tragedy—the porters' scene in *Macbeth*, or the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, at once relieve and heighten the solemnity of the rest of the piece, but here they only weary us by their utter futility—and they disappoint us where we reasonably expect some insight into the difficulties of the story, and do not find them. But the personal utterances of the chief actors are works of art of the highest order. Pompilia is exquisite: we rise from the book feeling that we have communed with one of the finest creations of poetry, and that our souls are refined and elevated by the communion.

Not that Guido and Caponsacchi are not also masterpieces; indeed, as being more complex and more comprehensive characters, they may be regarded as even greater triumphs of art than Pompilia; but there is a completeness and perfection about the latter which the mind at once grasps, and never afterwards forgets.

Little Pompilia with the patient brow,  
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,  
And under the white Hospital array,  
A flower-like body,

there she lies and breathes away her life in her artless moan of unaffected misery.

Of the two stories, Guido's is that which has by far the greatest intrinsic probability. The account given by him in the following lines of his feelings at the instant of the murder is very characteristic:

And then—why even then I think  
I the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,  
Surely—I pray God that I think aright!—  
Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing  
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb,  
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape  
Fronted me in the doorway—stood there faint  
With the recent pang, perhaps, of giving birth  
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child.  
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool  
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age  
Wrought more than enmity or malevolence,  
To practice and conspire against my peace.  
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.  
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell  
For a dowry with her to her husband's house;  
She, the mock mother, she that made the match,  
And married me to perdition, spring and source  
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart  
To brain, and hailed the Fury gave it birth—  
Violante Comparini, she it was,  
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,  
Opened: As if in turning from the Cross  
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,  
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head,  
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.

But if Guido's story, taken by itself, is plausible, it is no match for the pathos of Pompilia's simple autobiography. There is no violent indignation against her husband, the murderer alike of her happiness and her life—scarcely even of complaint; the whole force of her story is thrown into love for her babe, and devotion to her saviour Caponsacchi,

The lover of her life, the soldier saint;  
Oh, how good God is that my babe was born—  
Better than born—baptised and hid away  
Before this happened, safe from being hurt.  
Then I must lay my babe away with God,  
Nor think of him again for gratitude.  
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself  
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,  
The mist from other breath, fond mouths have made  
About a lustrous and pellucid soul;  
So that when I am gone but sorrow stays,  
And people need assurance in their doubt,  
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,  
The weak a saviour, and the vile a foe—  
Let him be present by the name invoked,  
Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi.  
And this man men call sinner? Jesus Christ!  
Of whom men said with mouths thyself maddest once:  
'He hath a devil'—say he was Thy saint,  
My Caponsacchi! Shield and show—unshroud  
In thine own time the glory of the soul,  
If aught obscure—if ink spot from vile pens  
Scribbling a charge against him—(I was glad  
Then, for the first time, that I could not write)  
Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze!

While the following quaint description of her introduction, at twelve years of age, to her future husband by Violante, is very characteristic:

And when, next day, the cavalier who came—

When he proved Guido Franceschini—old,  
And nothing like so tall as I myself,

Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,  
Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist  
He called an owl, and used for catching birds—  
And when he took my hand and made a smile—  
Why, the uncomfortableness of it all  
Seemed hardly more important in the case  
Than—when one gives you, say, a coin to spend,  
Its newness or its oldness; if the piece  
Weigh properly, and buy you what you wish,  
No matter whether you get grime or glare!  
Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.  
Here marriage was the coin; a dirty piece  
Would purchase me the praise of those I loved;  
About what else should I concern myself?

Caponsacchi's statement makes indeed large demands upon our credulity, and tries our faith to the uttermost, but the force of purity and truth in it renders doubt impossible, and the elevated strain of passionate indignation with which he concludes must have excited an outburst of applause which the officials found it difficult to suppress. The following exquisite lines occur in his description of the commencement of their flight to Rome:

For the first hour  
We both were silent in the night: I know  
Sometimes I did not see nor understand;  
Blackness engulfed me—partial stupor say—  
Then I would break way, breathe through the  
surprise,  
And be aware again, and see who sat  
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.  
I said to myself: 'I have caught it, I conceive,  
The mind of the mystery; 'tis the way they wake  
And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb  
Each by each, as their blessing was to die;  
Some signal they are promised and expect  
When to arise before the trumpet scares:  
So, through the whole course of the world they wait  
The last day, but so fearless and so safe!  
No otherwise in safety and not fear  
I lie, because she lies too by my side.'  
You know this is not love, sirs—it is faith;  
The feeling that there's God, He reigns and rules  
Out of this low world: that is all; no harm!  
At times she drew a soft sigh—music seemed  
Always to hover just above her lips,  
Not settle—break a silence music too.

And in these words of fiery indignation he withers the cowering Guido:

I conceive—  
In all due self-abasement might I speak—  
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!  
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise  
Not death. Your lights will teach you clearer! I  
Certainly have an instinct of my own  
I' the matter: hear with me and weigh its worth.  
Let us go away—leave Guido all alone  
Back on the world again that knows him now!  
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)  
Not to die so much as slide out of life,  
Pushed by the general horror and common hate,  
Low, lower—left o' the very ledge of things.  
I seem to see him catch convulsively,  
One by one, at all honest forms of life—  
At reason, order, decency, and use—  
To cramp him and get foothold by, at least.  
And still they disengage them from his clutch.  
'What! you are he that had Pompilia once,  
And so forwent her? Take not up with us.'  
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged  
Off all the table-land, whence life upsprings  
Aspiring to be immortality.



As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,  
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, sliders down  
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth  
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale,  
So I lose Guido in the loneliness.

## A COUNTY FAMILY.

### CHAPTER XXV.—JENNINGS' LEASE.

DOCTORS were summoned of course from far and near; they came, and went, taking their fees with them, but leaving the old Squire of Redcombe precisely as they found him, alive and likely to live, so far as continuance of breath was concerned, but a wreck in mind and body. One side of him was totally paralysed. The stalwart limbs that had borne him so bravely through so many hardships, the giant arms that had been wont to lift such weights and strike such blows, were to do work no more. Even his speech, which for a time had wandered with a vague indistinctness only too consonant with his dim and confused thoughts, had ceased to be intelligible. Only his eyes were still quick and restless, and evinced such evident loathing and repugnance at his son's presence, that the doctors had forbidden his approach to the sick-room. It was quite usual, they said (for what will they *not* say upon occasion?), for a person thus afflicted to take unaccountable aversions to those who were nearest and dearest to him. They received Mr William's account of his parent's seizure with the most grave credulity. He said that his father and himself were having some slight disagreement—it could scarcely be called a dispute—about the letting of the Home Farm, as to the tenant's right of shooting game, when all of a sudden the old man had started up, with cries of 'Away, away!' and 'Don't come near me!' and then had fallen on the floor. That was absolutely all that had occurred.

The great Dr Fleam, and the great Dr Pulsatilla, who had each founded schools of medicine diametrically opposed to each other, were unanimous with the local practitioner that such cases were by no means uncommon—that is, they were so when interrogated by ignorant, anxious Mrs Blackburn. When the three medicos were alone, Dr Fleam had quietly observed, and Dr Pulsatilla had gravely nodded his adhesion to the pregnant inquiry: 'Do you think it likely, Mr Allcase, that there was any actual physical violence?'

The local practitioner, sitting, with an air of much deference, upon the extreme edge of his chair, had replied: 'I think *not*, gentlemen—I really think *not*. Mr Stanhope informs me that he put that question to Mr Blackburn at the time, and it was answered in the negative.'

As the final result of the consultation, an electric battery was sent down from town, which was so far of use that its presence terrified the servants from approaching their master's room; and perfect quiet, it was decreed, was above all things necessary to him. Finally, so great were the resources of science, that a slate and pencil were provided, in case the invalid should recover the use of his fingers and be able to express his thoughts.

Thus Redcombe Manor became a hospital, and also in a sense, to one of its inmates at least, a prison. Lucy Waller was as fast bound and tied to the spot as the Squire himself; for, urged her father, would it not be the height of ungraciousness

to leave the hospitable old man in so sad a plight, when her occasional presence (as it evidently did) afforded him pleasure. But he did not also add, that the storm which had been so long threatening his own affairs had burst, and would have sunk him altogether but for the rumoured engagement of his daughter to William Blackburn, with which he pacified his more pressing claimants, as with a promise to pay. So long as he remained with her beneath the Squire's roof, these bills on the Bank of Expectation might obtain currency and credit; but should he leave it, his creditors, he was well aware, would begin to question the security.

To her father's arguments in favour of remaining at the Manor, Ellen's entreaties were added, to whom indeed Lucy's companionship was become more than ever grateful. After long watches by her mute grandfather's pillow, it was a relief indeed to take a brisk walk with her friend (for it had become too cold for croquet), or to seek with her that common ally, the piano, or to hear her clear voice read aloud the literature to which her own youth in its chill poverty had been a stranger, but that Lucy had taught her to love. In one respect, although their affection was so genuine, their friendship differed from that between most young ladies. At night, when they repaired to one another's rooms to brush out their back-hair—an operation which (perhaps from its electrical nature) has commonly quite a magical effect in eliciting mutual confidences—they did not speak to one another with total unreserve: perhaps one or both had a secret of her own which she wished to preserve, or perhaps it was only that they tacitly agreed to keep silence upon certain topics.

Herbert Stanhope of course remained at Redcombe. The Squire's 'Keep near me'—the last intelligible request he had made—was an invitation so pressing that it might almost have saved his conscience for continuing there, notwithstanding the mercenariness of his scheme, and the very moderate hope of its success. He knew that it was base, as a once rejected and still unwelcome suitor, to inflict his presence upon the daughter of the house; but, on the other hand, was he not useful to her, as indeed he was to all the rest, as a friend and protector? Without him what anarchy would there not have been at the Manor, with coarse William as Lord of Misrule? Even Mrs Blackburn, who saw the velvet glove without guessing at the hand of steel, confessed that nobody understood her Willy so well as Mr Stanhope. As for her husband, he was still eloquent, so far as eyes could speak, in his regard for the young man. They followed him with eager restless looks, and glanced from him to Ellen and from Ellen to him in a manner so wistful as to be unmistakable. To do Stanhope justice, he took no advantage of this favour to urge his suit, but seemed content to trust to time and its effects, the impression produced by his respectful but unceasing attention, his dexterous management of the common tyrant, and delicate consideration for his host and hostess, evinced in a hundred ways. Since he was present, and this John Denton away, he must, he concluded, surely be making progress, while the other receded in the young girl's good graces, or at most stood still; and one day it could not be but that he must needs get level with his rival, and the next day pass him. That is how one man always does out another with a



woman, as 'Sporting Dawlish' had observed in one of his practical philosophic letters.

That gentleman's correspondence had of late, however, become less philosophic than practical. He had hinted that his friend was making too much of a waiting race with the Blackburn filly, and had better go in and win. He had himself given a sop here and a sop there—and, so far as he was concerned, 'Herby' was quite welcome to the temporary accommodation—but nothing would prevent 'people talking,' and very unpleasant things had begun to be said. The absence of his friend from his usual haunts during the end of autumn had been commented upon without much scruple, and although Dawlish softened the expressions, he rendered them with sufficient faithfulness to prick his correspondent's pride—as he intended to do—to the very quick. Stanhope already owed Dawlish himself, for these friendly advances, more money than he could pay without parting with that remnant of the Curlew Hall estate which he could still call his own—and these advances were mere drops in his ocean of debts, the burden of which sat none the more lightly upon him because they could not be exacted by the law. If his present intentions were dishonourable, it must be conceded that his chief desire for their success arose from a certain sort of honour too—very much (though he would not have relished the parallel) as King Herod kept his royal word at the expense of his captive.

By help of the hold which Stanhope possessed over William Blackburn, he could doubtless have squeezed out of him a temporary loan, had that gentleman possessed the money; but he was, in truth, almost as much in want of funds, or at all events as destitute of them, as either of his father's guests, a fact which Mr Waller had ascertained by practical experiment. The ex-M.P., on the presumption of their future relationship, had actually attempted to borrow of his possible son-in-law, and failed. Fortunately for herself, Lucy was ignorant of the degradation she had thus been subjected to, nor did she suffer from it (as would otherwise have certainly been the case) in the increased familiarity of the young Squire's manner, for a reason with which we are acquainted. If he did not persecute her with marked attentions, it was because he did not dare bring matters to the point at which he must needs acknowledge himself as a suitor for her hand. Although, by having cut himself loose from his matrimonial moorings, he might indeed win a bride, he could of course not wear one; while Bess was alive, no matter how cruelly he had menaced her, or how sternly he had enjoined silence, he could never marry. There was not a day in which he did not secretly regret that he had not put that murderous scheme of his into execution, and made himself a free man in fact, and not merely in appearance. If those ravings of his, the listening to which had wrecked old Anthony in body and mind, had only been true! As it was, he had all the credit with his father of having put an end to Bess, with no sort of compensating advantage. If the Squire should recover his wits, the first use he made of them would doubtless be to settle on him some sum which, compared with his reasonable expectations, would be a mere pittance for life, and to exile him from Redcombe, and probably from England, for ever. While, in case of the invalid dying without

sign (as seemed by far the most probable), he would still be left by the old man's will without adequate, or, at all events, as compared with Ellen, proportionate provision. That a will that did thus unjustly distribute the family property was in existence, he knew for certain. The Squire himself had as good as owned it. Lawyer Moffat, whom he had had the imprudence to rudely interrogate upon the matter, had not denied it. He had only said: 'You had better direct your inquiries to your father, sir. If the will were in my possession, it would be most dishonourable in me to accede to your request' (for William had even asked to see it); 'but, as a matter of fact, I have not got it.'

The lawyer had spoken with an irritation apart from that which his question had aroused; for one of the first acts of old Anthony, upon his coming to Redcombe, had been to transfer all the family documents from Mr Moffat's keeping to his own. Perhaps he feared that his scapegrace son might, one day or other, tamper with his agent, as indeed he would certainly not have hesitated to do, had the opportunity been afforded to him; or perhaps he preferred to hold in his own hands the title-deeds of his house, to have tangible possession of what had so long been a mere dream of wealth. But, at all events, much to Mr Moffat's chagrin, he had carried off the fire-proof box labelled 'Blackburn Estate,' which had so long been the chief pride and ornament of 'the office,' and placed it in his bedroom at home. He had also retained possession of his own will. The lawyer's manner convinced William Blackburn, even more than his words, that he had in truth not got it, and, in fact, that it was somewhere at the Manor-house. But if so, where had the old Squire hid it? In what particular spot was this piece of parchment, the existence of which debarred him from his just rights, and the destruction of which would restore them to him—make him his father's sole heir! Truly, a pregnant question.

Since the old man's seizure, months had now elapsed, during which Mr William, debarred by the doctor's orders from the sick-room, and left a good deal to himself by the presence there of the rest of the family, had had much indoor leisure, and he had consumed it in a singular fashion. The time he had spared from billiards with Mr Waller and brandy-and-water with himself had been devoted to hide-and-seek. As in that innocent game, the seeker had had no desire (at present) for the object itself—for his father might recover and inquire for it—but merely to know where it was. He searched high and low, in places probable and in places almost impossible, but he could not find it. He did not even know whether he had ever been near finding it, since there was nobody to tell him when he was 'warm.' But, after all, he was not seriously disappointed, since the most promising cover remained yet undrawn. One of the most likely places where the Squire would keep his will was in that same strong-box in his own bedroom, and that, in the present case, was the very spot which his son was personally unable to explore. His native cunning, however, after much counsel with himself, enabled him to get this done by deputy. There had been really some disagreement between his father and himself (although not at the date he had assigned to it) concerning the right of shooting enjoyed by the tenant of the Home Farm, and he

easily contrived to make out to Mrs Blackburn that the matter was a serious grievance. It was nothing to him personally, he said, but it was very irritating to feel that the Squire's good-nature was being imposed upon. He was unwilling to trouble that fellow Moffat (who had behaved to him so disrespectfully), but if he could only see a copy of the lease in question, one look at it would decide the matter at issue. It was probably in the strong-box in his father's chamber, along with the other law documents, and he would be much obliged if his mother would just get it out for him.

She had replied, as he had expected, that for her part she did not know one law document from another. 'Then,' said he, 'some night, when you are keeping watch alone, bring them all to me, and in half an hour you shall have them back again.'

'But I hardly think, if your poor father were aware, Willy, that he would like me to meddle with the box,' hesitated Mrs Blackburn, who, with all her weakness for her son, was loyal to the husband of her youth. 'I have never done anything on the sly, as it were, nor against him; and now that his poor wits are wandering—no, no, I could never take advantage of that, Willy.'

'But, mother, I am only asking you to do something for his own good; something which, if he was right in his mind, and fit to form a judgment upon things, he would wish done himself. I tell you, he has been imposed upon by Farmer Jennings, and that ought not to be. Nor is he the only one who has imposed upon father of late, as you well know. There is a regular cabal in the house against you and me, because we stand always together, we two.'

'As we always shall, my darling,' added his mother gratefully, for it was not often that her son exhibited such affection.

'Well, let us do so now, then,' said practical William. 'You must get me a glimpse of these papers, and also take care that no one sees you doing it. They are all jealous of my "interference," as they choose to term the interest I take in my father's affairs, which are surely also my own, and yet how long is the estate to go without a master? It is impossible to say when father may recover, even if he recover at all, and in the meantime everything is at Mr Moffat's mercy.'

'But everybody says Mr Moffat is an honest man, Willy. Mr Waller, who has been his neighbour so long—'

'Yes, yes; but has he no reason for saying so? broke in William impatiently—'no interest in letting things be as they are? Why, Waller could always wind my father round his little finger, and will do so more than ever, if the old man should flicker up a little.'

'But Mr Stanhope, who is such a friend of yours, Willy, even he says—'

'He says,' hissed the other savagely. 'You might as well say "Ellen says" at once. O yes, he is my friend with a vengeance; such a friend as would strip me bare and wear my clothes. They would stick at no lie to do it. If either of them saw you bringing me the papers, that would be the ruin of me, mind that. And yet, as I said, there is no harm in it, but only good.—Now, don't argue about it, mother; because, you know, I hate to be argued with. It's only the lease I want, and even that only to look at. You shall have all back

in half an hour or less.—When is it you have to watch with father next?'

'I shall be left alone with him from twelve to-night, "William"!'—that was the only form which his mother's displeasure ever took: when some request was made of her more unreasonable than usual, she would call him (but still granting it), instead of Willy, 'William.'

'Then bring me the papers at two; I shall be waiting for them in my room. Be sure there is nobody stirring; and close the strong-box softly, so as not to wake father. There, that's well; and now I know you really love me.'

'I think you might have known that before, Willy,' sighed Mrs Blackburn. She felt she was about to do wrong, and yet she could not—perhaps, though she did not even own it to herself, she dared not—refuse her son. In the middle of the night, then, when all the household, including the invalid himself, were asleep, she rose softly from the sofa-bed by her husband's side, and opened the strong-box, the key of which, always kept in a cupboard in 'the Squire's Room,' William had given to her. There were a good many documents in the box, but she managed to wrap them all in a towel, and carry them to her son's room: 'There are fifteen,' whispered she as she gave them into his hands.

'Why should you have counted them? You did not suppose I meant to steal any, did you?' was his harsh reply.

She had not, in fact, entertained any such suspicion; but when he spoke thus, her heart misgave her; not on her son's account, even then, but on her own. She felt more than ever that she was doing wrong; for if William could hint such a suspicion of himself, what might not others hint if the thing were discovered? At the time appointed she returned to his room. He was waiting for her with the parcel. 'Jennings was right,' said he; 'but I am glad the matter is set at rest.' Yet his tone was full of sullen disappointment, and his face pale. Something, indeed, so strange was there both in tone and face, that before returning the documents to their receptacle, Mrs Blackburn found herself counting them over, and a sigh of relief involuntarily escaped her when she found the fifteen were there. As she closed the lid, she looked round mechanically, and by the dim glimmer of the night-light, she could see her husband's eyes, which she had thought fast closed, fixed earnestly upon her. Their look of keen reproof cut to her very heart!

'Have we been man and wife for fifty years,' it seemed to say, 'to be sundered thus at last!'

'I meant no harm, dear Anthony,' answered she to this mute appeal, falling upon her knees beside his pillow. 'It was only Jennings' lease, that Willy wanted to look at, and which he has been seeking for high and low; indeed, that was all.'

But the poor fading brain could, as it seemed, comprehend nothing about Jennings' lease; it could only understand, and continue by that reproachful gaze to shew that it understood, how old age and sickness, and the visitation of God, had been taken advantage of by one who had sworn to be faithful and true, notwithstanding all such things. She knelt for hours trying to comfort him, not without repentant kisses, bitter tears, but old Anthony would not be comforted. He had 'flickered up,' as William had phrased it, with a vengeance; and his wife, instead of longing—as the

watcher even more than the sick man is wont to long—for the morning, dreaded its coming, since others must then needs behold those reproachful eyes, and ask their meaning.

CHAPTER XXVI.—THE SQUIRE SPEAKS.

It was plain to all who sought the sick-room that day—and it was the morning custom even of his guests to look in with a kind nod and a smile, of which the old man seemed generally to be more or less conscious—that there was some change in the Squire's face. It was wont to be so still and quiet, immobile as a sculpture, always excepting the eyes—and now the wrinkled features were twitching and perturbed. Love and Duty, helped by Use, had hitherto been able to decipher his mute requests and supply his simple needs; but now they were at fault. It was plain that there was something wanted for which that scanty language had no sign. Wanted? Nay, yearned for. It was impossible to misunderstand him so far. And yet how to satisfy an unknown desire? There were sharp wits at work to interpret for him too. Not only his wife, repentant for the pain she had involuntarily caused him, and eager to make amends; and Ellen, whose loving eyes had ever been quickest to flash responsive to his dumb appeals; but Lucy Waller, always composed and prompt; and her father, who knew men so well, and all their needs, as he fancied—but not men in such a strait as this, and *their* needs; and Herbert Stanhope, keen and observant, and as willing as Ellen herself. He was really touched by the old man's condition, and could not regard it in the philosophic and abstract way that Mr Waller was wont to do over his after-breakfast cigar.

'Gad, sir, it's terrible,' that gentleman would observe. 'One has heard of one leg in the grave; but our poor friend yonder has everything in the grave except his eyes. It is as you might say, death in life; and there is no knowing how long it may last, for he is but about seventy. It would be a happy release to him, one might almost say, if he were to have done with it all.'

Some men are like the crows, who, when any of their brethren are smitten (or seem to be so) with a mortal disease, adopt at once the 'Happy Release' theory. And yet Mr Waller was by no means a heartless person, and was a very good-natured one. He cudgelled his subtle brains as soundly as the rest to get at the poor Squire's meaning, and would have given what he had to discover it. Mrs Blackburn, not without an inward struggle and a blush in her withered cheeks, had pointed to the strong-box, and even shewn her husband its contents, in case it was concerning them and their safety that those still piteous glances were so anxious. But Anthony closed his eyes, in token that his need did not lie there, and then opened them again, to rove from face to face with the same urgent inquiry as before. Mr Allcase had been sent for in the first instance, but he had been summoned away on some parochial emergency, in the night, so that Science was not at hand to solve the difficulty, which it probably might have done. It has been said, indeed, by some one, doubtless who owed medicine a bad turn: 'Leave Nature to herself' (as though she were a child in a passion), 'and she will come round;' but surely there are cases where skill can

hasten her movements. Thus, a doctor might have drawn at once a deduction from the poor Squire's altered features, which it took unlearned helplessness hours to draw.

'Do you think, grandfather,' said Ellen, driven to her wits' end, and when all were weary with touching and pointing and asking 'Is it this?' 'Is it that?'—'that you could write down the first letter, if I brought you the slate?'

This implement had been tried and found useless so often, that it had long ago been thrown aside, and even placed in another room. Scarce a muscle of poor old Anthony—save a certain involuntary twitching of the mouth—had stirred for months, and far less a finger. But no sooner did Ellen utter the word 'slate,' than, like fire to flax, it lit up the white bearded face with eager joy.

*Eureka!* The problem was solved so far, at all events. They brought slate and pencil, and released his nerveless hands from the clothes that covered them, and propped him up with pillows, and watched as men of old might have watched at some Sibyl's cave for her vague prophecy; and scarce could one of her leaf-inscribed mysteries, after the wind had taken the rest, have been more difficult and inscrutable. He strove, and strove; but only could you trace some wandering scratches, a spider-web scrawl with the meaning strangled in it like any fly. And yet it was so pitifully plain that it *had* a meaning, though not the eyes of love, nor even those of deftest compositor (had such been there), could decipher it.

'I have it!' cried Ellen suddenly; and fleeing from the room, she returned at once with a worn and dog-eared little volume. It was a relic of those so different days when she had been pupil-teacher at the village school under Slogan, and was in fact a spelling-book. She opened it at the alphabet, great A, great B, from which so many lisping little ones had learned their first lesson; and now she was to teach it once again to one in *second* childhood, upon the threshold of life, indeed, like them, but about to *leave* it. The rest stood round her, keeping an anxious silence as she held the open book before her grandfather, and touched the letters slowly with the pencil one by one.

'When I come to the first letter of the thing you wish for, grandfather dear,' she had said, 'you must close your eyes.'

She had gone over half of them, and still, though his eyes had seemed to follow her every movement, they had given no sign.

'It is too much for him,' whispered Mr Waller to Stanhope; 'I doubt whether he comprehends at all;' and indeed so Stanhope and the rest thought; but the faithful fingers pursued their task nevertheless to the end, or rather just short of the end, when they were rewarded, for, at the letter W, Anthony's eyelids dropped.

'Does the thing you wish for begin with W, grandfather?'

No placard, the most plainly printed, that was ever stuck on wall could have been read more easily than that earnest glance of his 'Yes, yes.'

Ellen had thus discovered, as it seemed, provided only that this new-born intelligence of the old man should last, a mode of interpretation for all his thoughts. But *would* it last? The Squire's brain had been quickened into activity by a circumstance, the precise nature of which only one person present could have indicated. Had it been awakened



only to sink back again into torpor, since the incident that aroused it was not likely to recur? The sick man already appeared much fatigued, as with his unaccustomed exertions, not to mention those hours of untranslated anxiety, he well might be, and it was evident that only by effort could he keep his attention fixed on the task before him, but he did do so, so far as to spell out the first four letters of his son's name—W, I, L, L—without which indication of his wishes they would certainly not have been guessed. Then his eyes closed, as though he had done enough for that day, and he sank back, as if exhausted.

Then a council was held as to whether or not William should be sent for: Mrs Blackburn opining that he should be, since the Squire was so evidently desirous for reconciliation with him; but the rest, unwilling to act in such direct contradiction to the doctor's orders, opposed this. Finally, it was resolved to await, at all events, the arrival of Mr Allcase.

The surgeon positively declined to undertake the responsibility of disobeying his metropolitan chiefs. They had declared it to be their opinion that it would be highly dangerous, and might be even fatal to the patient, to permit access of the person who (whether wilfully or not) had been the immediate cause of his seizure, and at whose approach he had since shewn such evident marks of perturbation.

'But my husband has asked to see him,' urged Mrs Blackburn.

Mr Allcase smiled blandly, and shook his head.

His practice was a general one, but had not included examination of the paralytic by alphabet. He had listened to the whole account—as he was accustomed to listen to the extraneous detail of the sick-room, unprofessional opinions, and new and miraculous methods of treatment—with good-natured incredulity.

'It is very natural in you, my dear madam, to imagine that Mr Blackburn has expressed the wish in question; but in my opinion the whole affair is a delusion. He has not for three months been in a condition to entertain such a desire, much less to express it, although what you tell me of his attempting to write is very curious, very curious indeed. The brain may be active, but it is only mechanically so. Miss Ellen here is about to give him his cordial, which will put him, for the moment, at his best. Let her ask him, in my presence, whether he is of the same mind with respect to his son William; if he still wishes not to see him. If so, let him close his eyes, in token thereof, as you say it was understood he should do on the previous occasion.'

Mrs Blackburn was eager for this test; and the poor Squire being propped up as usual, while Ellen administered the potion, the question was put to him, as well as the proposed method of reply.

'Do you still wish not to see Uncle William, grandfather?'

The Squire closed his eyes and kept them fast, notwithstanding that quite a murmur of surprise broke forth from the womenfolk.

'There!' said the doctor, with quiet triumph; 'did I not tell you so? My dear madam, it is folly to be annoyed by such an incident' (for the poor lady had turned very pale)—'these are not even the caprices of a sick man. Mr Blackburn would

have closed his eyes from very weakness, no matter what question you had proposed to him. For my part, I confess that at present I see no alteration in our poor patient. There is nothing for it, till some change occurs, but the same course of treatment—rest and quiet, quiet and rest: and you will forgive me if I hint—though it seems cruel to deprive one in his position of the society of a single friend—that there must not be too many people about him at a time.' And with that Mr Allcase, who was a man of action, and would never have made a fortune in Mayfair, took his leave, and proceeded as usual to make his report below stairs, nominally to Mr William, but in fact to Mr Waller and Stanhope.

There is no trade in which the professional has so decided an advantage over the layman as in physic. Few can gainsay him; for intelligent men, who, masters of their own calling, are inclined to credit others with the same knowledge of their proper affairs, have often but slight acquaintance with the phenomena of the sick-room. Still, Mr Allcase did not find his present audience so easy of conviction as the last. They stuck to it that the Squire had been in full possession of his wits, whatever might have been amiss with speech and movement, when he had spelled out the beginning of his son's name that morning.

'My good sir, we must believe the evidence of our own senses,' urged Mr Waller.

The surgeon's smile was pregnant with pity and good nature.

'Why, you are worse than Gibbon, Mr Allcase. You refuse to believe a miracle because it is contrary to your mere medical experience.'

'I don't know to what precise circumstance you are referring, Mr Waller; but I should say that Dr Gibbon was right.'

'Nay,' added Stanhope; 'why, one of the best scenes that Dumas ever wrote is where the paralytic old Noirtier, assisted by his grand-daughter—just as it might be Mr Blackburn and Miss Ellen—makes his will by merely winking his eyes.'

'I don't suppose Mr Dumas is a medical man,' observed the surgeon drily. 'If the patient he describes had winked with one eye, and pointed over his left shoulder, I could have understood what was meant.—Good-morning, gentlemen, for I have no more time to spare for your experimental philosophy.' And he mounted his cob, and rode away, as his custom was, at the gallop.

'There's a sceptic for you,' observed Stanhope laughing; 'and yet I suppose the man is right. He ought to know what he's talking about; and, besides, it appears that Mr Blackburn did decline to see his son, by the same token that we took for'—

'My dear Stanhope, I've got it,' interposed Mr Waller gravely. 'Allcase is a mere fanatic, with the Pharmacopœia for a Bible; but he is right thus far—that it is not his son whom Blackburn wishes to see. Perhaps I should never have hit upon it (although he spoke as plain as letters could speak, poor fellow), if it had not been for your chance allusion to Dumas. What the Squire wants to see is not William, but his WILL. Now, the question is—Where is it?'